

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515–3202**

July 13, 2023

The Honorable Anthony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Rena Bitter  
Assistant Secretary of State  
Bureau of Consular Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
600 19th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Secretary Blinken and Assistant Secretary Bitter:

We are writing to express our concerns with the backlogs in passport services our constituents are experiencing at the New York Passport Agency. After almost two years of travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, our constituents are excited to make up for lost time and enjoy the experiences offered by foreign travel. These completely unacceptable delays have caused our constituents to lose out on the cost of airline fees and vacations, even after some constituents paid an extra fee to expedite their application.

Our staff have diligently performed their duty as a bridge of communication between the constituent and the New York Passport Agency regarding the processing and approval of the passport applications. Despite the increase in passport requests handled by our offices this year, we had traditionally been able to effectively liaison with the agency and obtain passports within the Bureau of Consular Affairs' posted time period.<sup>1</sup>

However, our offices lost contact with the New York Passport Agency over the past three weeks, resulting in a whirlwind of chaos and confusion that has forced constituents to cancel travel plans and lose thousands of dollars in nonrefundable costs. It was only after numerous complaints that we were able to connect with New York Passport Agency officials, although our backlog still persists.

Our offices have collectively fielded hundreds of calls a day from constituents upset with the lack of response to their requests. Though we lack acknowledgment from agencies outside our region, we have seen a positive outcome on passport applications processed in other regions. Our offices have been forced to make passport appointments for constituents at said agencies, ranging from Buffalo to San Diego, for passport applications already outside of processing times. Constituents should not have to add an additional expense and travel just to obtain their passport.

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<sup>1</sup> [Processing Times for U.S. Passports \(state.gov\)](https://state.gov/passports)

Another unjust expense constituents face is the expedited processing request. In some instances, constituents who applied in a timely manner are now being asked to pay an additional expediting service fee and shipping fee, and the completion of their passport application is still not guaranteed. These inconveniences will continue without the ability to get in touch with New York Passport Agency.

Notably, our offices were recently notified that the New York Passport Agency has four vacant positions with no apparent strategy to mitigate this staffing shortage. Without the proper staffing in place, our constituents who placed requests within the established timeline stand to miss weddings, family vacations, business trips, and more. To date, our offices are waiting on responses to over 65 requests from the agency that are nearing or have exceeded the timelines publicly posted by the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

With this in mind, we urge the administration to take the necessary steps to mitigate the delays we are experiencing at the New York Passport Agency. We request a response from the Department detailing the following no later than July 27th, 2023:

1. How many employees does the New York Passport Agency have dedicated to handling passport requests and how does this number compare to July of 2022?
2. How does the Department plan to address the reported staffing shortages experienced by the New York Passport Agency?
3. What steps, if any, has the department taken to address the backlog in requests at the New York Passport Agency and accelerate the approvals of outstanding requests beyond the Bureau of Consular Affairs' stated timeline?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Andrew R. Garbarino  
Member of Congress



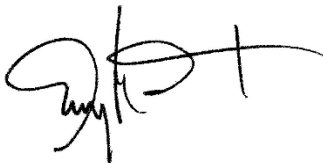
Nick LaLota  
Member of Congress



Mike Lawler  
Member of Congress



Nicole Malliotakis  
Member of Congress



Anthony D'Esposito  
Member of Congress



Marc Molinaro  
Member of Congress